

# Asia-South Pacific Education Watch

## Solomon Islands: Summary Report

### Educational Experience Survey

Education, Language and Literacy Experience



## About Asia South Pacific Education Watch Initiative

The critical state and ailing condition of education in many countries in Asia-South Pacific region compels serious and urgent attention from all education stakeholders.

Centuries of neglect, underinvestment in education, corruption, and inefficiency by successive governments in the countries of the region have left a grim toll in poor education performance marked by low school attendance and survival rates, high dropout and illiteracy rates, and substandard education quality.

Moreover, there are glaring disparities in access to education and learning opportunities: hundreds of millions of impoverished and disadvantaged groups which include out-of-school children and youth, child workers, children in conflict areas, women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, dalit caste and other socially discriminated sectors, remain largely unreached and excluded by the education system.

Hence they are denied their fundamental human right to education and hindered from availing of the empowering and transformative tool of quality, life-long learning that could have equipped them to realize their full human potential, uplift their living conditions, and participate meaningfully in governance and in decisions that affect their lives.

### At Midway: Failing Grade in EFA

In the year 2000, governments and the international community affirmed their commitment to quality Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Midway to target year 2015, government assessments of EFA progress reveal that education gaps and disparities persist, and education conditions may even be worsening as indicated by shortfalls and reversals in EFA achievement.

The landmark year 2007 therefore presents a timely opportunity for civil society networks to engage governments in addressing the unmet EFA goals and MDG education targets, especially for disadvantaged groups.

### Real World Strategies

Spurred by the challenge of pushing for accelerated progress towards EFA, the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) launched the Real World Strategies (RWS) programme to undertake realistic and practical initiatives based on the actual conditions, experiences, and aspirations of people in communities.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

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## **Educational Experience Survey**

**Education, Language and Literacy Experience**



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Education Experience Survey  
Education, Language and Experience

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The **Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education** (ASPBAE) is a regional association of organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilizing and supporting community and people's organizations, national education coalitions, teachers unions, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding.

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# Solomon Islands: Summary Report

## Educational Experience Survey

### Education, Language and Literacy Experience

Political turmoil in recent years has severely weakened the educational system in the Solomon Islands, like many institutions in the country. This has triggered crises in different aspects of the system: alarmingly low literacy rates, poor quality of education, and a diminishing participation among the youth in schools.

But the obstacles can be overcome. Advocates have identified immediate and long-term prospects for reform, while citizens have acknowledged the need for education in daily life. This paper discusses the literacy situation and the solutions that can pave the way for compliance with the goals of Education for All.

#### A. Education Watch Initiative

The Education Watch initiative is being implemented in the Solomon Islands by the Coalition on Education Solomon Islands (COESI) in partnership with Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE).

COESI aims to generate a reliable body of information that will:

- Accurately explain how much the national government has done and can do to meet the goal of educating the community; and
- Provide a firm basis for community participation in policy advocacy and program development.

COESI initially focused on conducting research to determine literacy levels, particularly among out-of-school youth and adults. COESI also helps monitor education programs across the Asia-Pacific region, such as the School Report Card project of ASPBAE.

## **B. Educational Experience Survey**

The Educational Experience Survey is a key element of the Education Watch initiative. Developed by ASPBAE and COESI in collaboration with the Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN), it was designed to collect accurate and statistically significant information about educational, language, and literacy experience at the village and individual levels in selected communities in Honiara and Malaita.

The survey was conducted using a two-stage systematic sampling method in Honiara and Malaita provinces from November 2006 to March 2007, with 2,200 people between the ages of 15 and 60 years interviewed.

This report summarizes the main findings of the survey. A full version is available upon request. While the survey was conducted in only two provinces, the findings and implications apply to the whole of the Solomon Islands. Still, one immediate need that emerged from the survey is for an extended study to include other provinces. Such a study needs to be done on a regular basis so that trends and progress

*Education Watch surveyor interviewing respondent at Gilbert Camp settlement in Honiara*



can be tracked over time. There is potential also for the survey to be adapted to examine a wide range of educational issues in greater detail.

## C. Education for All (EFA) – Promises and Progress

In April 2000, the Solomon Islands joined 163 other nations which committed to achieve what has become known as Education for All.

In 2004, the Solomon Islands government began a 15-year program to rehabilitate and reform the education system which, like many institutions in the country, had been severely disrupted by years of ethnic tension and civil disturbance. The first step was to develop an Education Strategic Plan.

While the plan does not explicitly recognize the EFA goals, its overarching objective echoes a central concept of the EFA framework, which is to provide universal access to basic education for all children by 2015. The plan also commits to improving access to technical and vocational education and training.

The original and subsequent editions of the plan establish priorities and plans of action to comprehensively reform the education system to ensure the “equitable delivery of quality education and training services to all people throughout Solomon Islands.”

According to the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report: Strong Foundations, Early Childhood Care and Education, there are two areas where some progress is evident in the Solomon Islands:

- Pre-primary gross enrolment ratios have increased from 35% in 1999 to 41% in 2004; and
- By 2004, the Solomon Islands moved close to gender parity in primary education gross enrolment ratios, with a gender parity index of 0.97.

**However, it is striking to note that for most EFA indicators, data is simply unavailable.** There is, for example, insufficient data for an EFA Development Index to be calculated for Solomon Islands. This index would have allowed country comparisons to track progress towards complying with EFA Goals.

This paucity of accurate and reliable data has been noted by many official sources in recent years, including the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.[1]

The little comparative data available indicates that the Solomon Islands’ education sector performance compares poorly with Pacific

countries. Information published by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community shows that the Solomon Islands is ranked:

- 14<sup>th</sup> out of 15 Pacific countries on primary school net enrolment ratios;
- 10<sup>th</sup> out of 15 in the proportion of students commencing in Grade 1 who reach Grade 5; and
- 13<sup>th</sup> out of 15 in relation to youth literacy rates.[2]

These rankings tend to confirm assessments made by some of the Solomon Islands' major international development partners. AusAID has observed that "the literacy rate is low and access to primary and secondary education is limited compared with other Pacific countries."<sup>[3]</sup>

In a similar vein, NZAID notes that recent conflicts in the Solomon Islands have seriously disrupted the provision of education services to the extent that "few children complete primary school ... education facilities are deficient and instructional materials are non-existent in most schools."<sup>[4]</sup> NZAID concludes that "**there is a serious risk that the country may not achieve any of the EFA goals or the education-related MDGs (Millennium Development Goals).**"<sup>[5]</sup>

The 2006 Global Monitoring Report observes that for countries like the Solomon Islands where progress has been slow, "achieving EFA will require intervention throughout the school system" and "a redoubling of efforts in key policy areas," including:

- Planning and financing for EFA;
- Teacher supply and quality;
- Reaching the disadvantaged sectors—out-of-school youth, and adults, the poor, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, the disabled, and the sick;
- Adapting to conflict, natural disaster, and economic instability;
- Establishing safe and healthy schools; and
- Harnessing higher levels of better targeted, better coordinated, and more predictable international assistance.





## D. Key Messages from the Educational Experience Survey

The survey findings point to areas of much needed reform in the education sector in the Solomon Islands. Hence, this report is intended as a constructive contribution in support of the EFA goals.

As highlighted in the Survey, the Solomon Islands face:

1. **A crisis in literacy**, as seen in low literacy rates in the community, dramatically lower than officially reported rates;
2. **A crisis in school quality**, as shown by low literacy rates for those who have completed school; and
3. **A crisis in youth engagement in learning**, as proven by low school participation rates for those aged 15 to 19 years.

These are significant challenges requiring concerted government and community attention, and coordinated, long-term financing assistance from international development partners. Yet they are not insurmountable. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of the community, the suggestions in this report and the many documented success stories from around the globe, practical strategies can be devised.

ASPBAE and COESI urge the Solomon Islands government and its international development partners to accept these challenges and accelerate progress towards achievement of the EFA Goals.

*Surveyor interviewing resident at Mamanawata Settlement, Honiara while piloting the questionnaire*

## E. Key Findings from the Educational Experience Survey

### I. Attitudes to Literacy and Education

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents believe that being able to read, write, and count is an important everyday life skill:

- 84.9% of respondents indicate that reading skills are very useful or useful sometimes in their everyday life;
- 84.2% indicate that writing skills are very useful or useful sometimes; and
- 94.1% indicate that counting skills are very useful or useful sometimes.

There is also near universal recognition of the importance of school education: 97.7% of respondents agree that it is very important for all children to go to school.

### 2. Educational Experience

However, despite this understanding, almost half or 45.9% of 15- to 19-year-olds are not attending school. School attendance for girls in this age group is particularly worrying, with more than half or 53.8% not attending school.

There are provincial variations as well. Fifty-two percent or more than half of young people in this age group in Malaita and 42% in Honiara are not attending school. (See Table 1).

AT SCHOOL Now? 15-19 YEARS			
	Yes	No	Total
<b>Male</b>	148	89	237
%	62.4	37.6	100
<b>Female</b>	117	136	253
%	46.2	53.8	100
<b>Honiara</b>	175	127	302
%	57.9	42.1	100
<b>Malaita</b>	90	98	188
%	47.9	52.1	100
<b>Total</b>	265	225	490
%	54.1	45.9	100

Table 1. Number and percentage of young people aged 15 to 19 in Honiara and Malaita who are attending and not attending school

Primary school participation rates have also declined dramatically in recent years. The school attendance of respondents 15 to 19 years old is low in contrast to the higher rates of school completion reported by respondents 20 to 24 years old and 25 to 29 years old. Two-thirds of all respondents in these older age groups report that they completed primary school. (See Table 2).

<b>Completed Primary School, 15-60 Years</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>15-19 years</b>	140	118
%	54.3	45.7
<b>20-24 years</b>	256	135
%	65.5	34.5
<b>25-29 years</b>	231	118
%	66.2	33.8
<b>30-39 years</b>	227	198
%	53.4	46.6
<b>40-49 years</b>	96	133
%	41.9	58.0
<b>50-60 years</b>	62	111
%	35.8	64.1

*Table 2. Number and percentage of respondents in different age groups who completed primary school*

There is clearly a **crisis in youth engagement in schooling** in the Solomon Islands.

Low levels of youth participation in school will mean low levels of educational attainment and fewer life opportunities for these young people. Immediate action is required to provide meaningful second-chance learning opportunities for those young people who have been denied a full basic education.

Urgent action is also needed to reverse the decline in primary school participation to ensure that the next generation of young people is not similarly disadvantaged.

A useful starting point for action are the main barriers to school participation identified in the survey. Table 3 lists the percentage of respondents who cited the various obstacles, which are:

- Physical distance between schools and students;
- Parental expectations that helping at home should take priority over school ing;
- Students' lack of interest in school; and

- High cost of school fees, specifically the co-contribution, which is the amount parents are required to pay.

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING PRIMARY SCHOOL			
	Male	Female	Total
<b>School too far away</b>	147	180	327
% of respondents	54.2	47.6	50.4
<b>School fees too high</b>	116	137	253
% of respondents	42.8	36.2	39
<b>Other costs too high</b>	74	104	178
% of respondents	27.3	27.5	27.4
<b>School not safe</b>	62	95	157
% of respondents	22.9	25.1	24.2
<b>Not enough desks, books</b>	55	83	138
% of respondents	20.3	22	21.3
<b>No toilets for girls</b>	54	80	134
% of respondents	19.9	21.2	20.6
<b>Not interested</b>	119	150	269
% of respondents	43.9	39.7	41.4
<b>Parents want help at home</b>	102	204	306
% of respondents	37.6	54	47.1
<b>Parents want me to work</b>	77	119	196
% of respondents	28.4	31.5	30.2

*Table 3. Number and percentage of respondents citing various reasons that keep students away from school*

It is significant to note that parents impose more pressure on females than on males to help at home. This was the most frequently cited reason females gave for not attending school. More female respondents also cited school safety, absence of toilet facilities, and parents' expectations for them to work as reasons for not attending primary school.

Those wishing to continue to secondary education face many of the same barriers. In fact, the barriers are even more significant as children grow older. In relation to school fees, for example, the level of co-contribution expected from parents increases in the senior secondary years. Young people may also face more pressure from parents and extended family to help at home and contribute to domestic responsibilities as they become older and stronger.

The social, economic, and human costs of failing to overcome these barriers will far outweigh the short-term investment needed to improve access to basic educational opportunities.

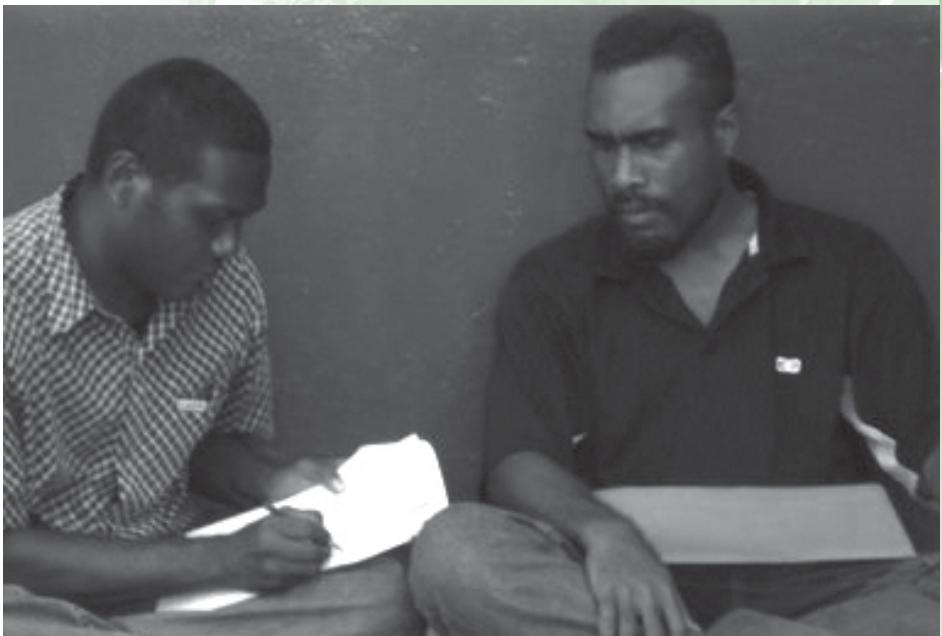
### 3. Language Experience

It is common for Solomon Islanders to be orally fluent in two or more languages. People use different languages in different settings.

In Malaita, traditional local or vernacular languages called langus are spoken at home far more widely than either of the official languages, Pijin or English. But in conversations between friends, Pijin is used more frequently.

In Honiara, while the patterns of language use vary slightly, multiple language fluency is also clearly evident.

While most people grow up with langus as their first language, langus are not used as languages of instruction in schools. A number of other countries, including Papua New Guinea, have judged that there are learning and cultural advantages in using vernacular instruction in the early years of schooling. This issue deserves serious study in the Solomon Islands. It may be one way of engaging more students in formal education and giving them a head start into future learning at school.



*Education Watch  
Surveyors'  
Training  
Workshop in  
Honiara*

### 4. Literacy – Measures and Methods

The most recent official literacy statistics based on the 1999 national census claim that 76.6% of the adult population are literate. A national youth literacy rate of 62% derived from 1991 data has also been reported.

Using census-derived data as a basis for calculating literacy rates is widely acknowledged to be flawed. It is a proxy indicator, relying on self-declaration rather than individual assessment. It is also more likely a household opinion rather than an accurate individual estimation, with answers given by the head of the household on behalf of other members of the family.

The survey incorporates more rigorous methodology. It encompasses self-assessed levels of reading and writing confidence in both langus and the official languages and, more importantly, an independent assessment of each respondent's literacy skills. As a result, it presents a much more complete understanding of literacy in the two provinces in which data was collected.

## 5. Literacy – Reading and Writing Confidence

While langus is very commonly used in everyday lives, people are not confident of their ability to read and write their langus:

- Less than half of respondents or 44.8% indicate they can read their langus easily and 22.8% indicate that they cannot read it; and
- 39.9% of respondents indicate they can write their langus easily and 28.8% say they cannot write it.

If vernacular languages were used as languages of instruction in schools, these figures could be expected to improve.

What is perhaps more alarming is that people also lack confidence in their ability to read their preferred official language. Only 46.4% say they can read their preferred official language easily and one out of four or 25% say they cannot read it at all. This lack of reading and writing confidence is worrying, especially when, as noted earlier, an overwhelming proportion of people say that being able to read and write is important in their everyday lives.

## 6. Literacy – Assessment of Literacy Levels

The results of the literacy assessment present the failings of the education system even more starkly.

The detailed assessment of the component skills of literacy—reading, writing, counting and the ability to use these skills in everyday lives—shows that **just 17% of respondents are literate**; 42.7% are semi-literate, and 40.2% are non-literate.

It should be emphasized at this point that the bar was not set high for respondents to be classified as literate, as can be seen by the sample questions at the end of the main report.

The Solomon Islands is in the midst of a **literacy crisis**. The defining elements of this crisis, as listed in Table 4, are that:

- Literacy levels in Malaita, at just 7%, are much lower than in Honiara at 28%.
- Males are more likely to be literate than females; 21% of males are literate compared to 14% of females.
- Literacy levels at all ages are poor. The highest literacy rate is only 26% for the 15- to 19-year age group.
- Youth literacy rates of 20% are higher than adult literacy rates of 16%.
- While the youngest age group has the highest literacy rate, it also has the second highest level of non-literates at 18%, behind only the 30- to 39-year age group, 22% of whom are non-literate.

Literacy Classifications			
	Non-Literate	Semi-Literate	Literate
<b>Overall literacy (%)</b>	40.2	42.7	17.0
<b>Male (%)</b>	29.3	49.6	21.1
<b>Female (%)</b>	45.7	39.8	14.5
<b>Honiara (%)</b>	23.6	48.5	27.8
<b>Malaita (%)</b>	55.6	37.4	7.0
<b>Youth (15-19 years)</b>			
Male (%)	22.3	54.4	23.3
Female (%)	34.6	47.8	17.4
Youth (%)	28.5	51.0	20.3
<b>Adult (25-60 years)</b>			
Male (%)	34.6	46.0	19.4
Female (%)	53.8	33.9	12.3
Adult (%)	44.3	39.9	15.8

*Table 4.  
Percentage of  
respondents who  
are non-literate,  
semi-literate,  
and literate*

These results pose some serious questions to those overseeing the education system in the Solomon Islands, especially the government and international development partners.



*Education Watch surveyor interviewing a mother at Mamanawata settlement*

**The results of the survey will hopefully shake the complacency with which successive governments have viewed the issue of literacy in the community. Many have known that the official literacy rates are unreliable and yet these are still cited in official publications. The official figures are grossly misleading and should no longer be used as a basis for policy-making.**

There is a clear correlation between completion of primary school and the acquisition of literacy skills. Almost all literates in the survey completed primary school and almost all of those who did not attend primary school are non-literate.

Unless urgent action is taken to reverse the decline in primary school participation, as called for earlier, the pattern of low literacy will become even more deeply entrenched in the community.

But as survey findings show, merely sending children to school does not guarantee the acquisition of literacy skills.

**Only 28.1% of those who complete primary school are literate.** This is well short of the target set in the government's 2004-2006 National Education Plan that 60% of students in Year 4 show satisfactory literacy achievement, as tested by the Solomon Islands Standardised Tests of Achievement.

The literacy rate for those who have completed secondary school is higher, but still, **less than half of those who complete secondary school are literate.**

There is clearly also a **crisis of quality in our schools.** It is imperative that the government redouble its efforts to dramatically lift the quality of education available in schools. Quality is just as important as participation.

## F. Policy Implications – Calls for Urgent Action

ASPBAE and COESI urge the Solomon Islands Government and its international development partners to accept the challenges posed by this report and to take urgent action to accelerate progress towards achievement of the EFA Goals.

While the challenges are significant, they are neither new nor insurmountable. Practical responses can be devised, drawing on the many documented success stories from around the globe and the experience of many in the community.

What is required most is political will from the country's leaders, and coordinated and consistent support from international development partners.

In response to the findings that there is a **crisis in literacy**, a **crisis in school quality**, and a **crisis in youth engagement in learning**, we urge the following urgent actions which should be considered alongside the many strategies proposed in the EFA Global Monitoring Reports:

### I. Provide Second-Chance Learning Opportunities for Out-of-School Youth and Adults

The government and its international development partners must take urgent action to ensure that the learning needs of all out-of-school youth and adults are met through equitable access to quality appropriate learning and life skills programs, including literacy and numeracy. These reflect Goals 3 and 6 of Education for All.

In particular, the government should develop a second-chance education strategy aimed at providing learning opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults. The strategy should focus on:

- a) Literacy skills;
- b) Life and work skills; and
- c) Those who have been excluded from formal schooling, especially girls and youth in remote areas.

In developing its second-chance education strategy, the government should:

- a) Draw on the experience of, and provide support to, those civil society organisations with an active involvement in providing non-formal education and training for young people and adults who have missed out on a full education;

- b) Ensure that the efforts of the various government and civil society providers of non-formal education and training are better coordinated and targeted to meet community needs; and
- c) Institute support systems and structures which respect alternative or non-formal approaches to learning and, at the same time, provide a pathway into formal schooling for those who wish to do so.

## 2 Abolish Primary School Co-Contributions Fees and Improve Access to Primary Education

The government and its international development partners must take urgent action to ensure that by 2015 all children have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. This implements Goal 2 of Education for All.

The government should immediately review its school financing policy and abolish the requirement on parents to make a co-contribution to the costs of schooling.

The government should adopt as policy the view that no child should be denied access to basic educational opportunity by geography. All children should have convenient admittance to free local primary schools or to appropriate free distance learning opportunities.

## 3. Guarantee Quality Education in Schools

The government and its international development partners must pay particular attention to the quality shortfalls identified in the National Education Action Plan 2007-2009:

- a) The rate of teacher certification must be increased and the proportion of uncertified classroom teachers at all levels of schooling must be reduced.
- b) Student-teacher ratios at all levels must be further improved.
- c) The acquisition of literacy, numeracy, and life skills must be the daily focus of classroom activities.
- d) Students must be encouraged in their learning by methods, content, and materials which allow them to acquire literacy, numeracy, and life skills.

Schools must be made relevant to the lives, interests and cultural contexts of young people in the Solomon Islands. Additional measures to increase the quality of education in schools include:



- a) The improvement and maintenance of school infrastructure, especially to ensure clean water supplies, hygienic toilet facilities for boys and girls, and, at secondary schools, safe dormitory facilities. A critical element of this task should be to conduct a national audit of all school buildings and facilities, to provide a clear basis for infrastructure improvement programs;
- b) Codes of behaviour for students and teachers to ensure safe learning environments;
- c) Free school meals programs to improve nutrition, encourage attendance and learning, and strengthen connections between families and schools.

#### **4. Develop a Vernacular Language Policy**

The government and its international development partners should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the costs and benefits of using vernacular languages as the principal means of instruction in the early years of schooling. This analysis should involve extensive public consultation and consideration of the approaches taken in similarly situated countries in the Pacific.

#### **5. Develop a National Literacy Policy and Increase Funding for Literacy**

The government and its international development partners should acknowledge that the Solomon Islands is facing a literacy crisis and must take urgent action to achieve a 50% increase in adult literacy by 2015, which is Education for All's Goal 4.

In particular, the government should develop a national literacy policy, which focuses on measures to address the literacy needs of out-of-school youth, adults, girls and women, and people living in remote communities. The policy should draw on the experience of, and provide support to, those civil society organisations with an active involvement in non-formal and adult education, especially in literacy training.

The government and its international development partners should refrain from using official literacy rates derived from the 1999 census. We recommend that the methodology and results obtained in this survey be acknowledged as producing accurate and reliable literacy data, and that the government work with ASPBAE and COESI to extend the Educational Experience Survey including the literacy assessment into other provinces around the country.

## G. A Final Note: The Challenges Ahead

While this report highlights the magnitude of some of the challenges facing the Solomon Islands, it also presents a positive message: Practical steps can be taken to meet these challenges.

With determined and concerted action, it is possible to make significant progress towards achievement of the EFA Goals in the Solomon Islands by 2015.

Civil society organisations stand ready to play their part by entering into partnerships with government in contributing to policy development and to providing learning opportunities, for example, second-chance opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults.

We urge the Solomon Islands Government and its international development partners to rise to these challenges and take urgent action to accelerate progress towards the EFA Goals.

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### Endnotes

- [1] See *Definitions of MDG Targets & Indicators* on the website of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (<http://www.spc.int/mdgs/>) *Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006*, p.13.
- [2] See *MDG Ranking Graphs: Education Indicators* on the website of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community ([http://www.spc.int/prism/mdg/\\_ed\\_mdg\\_ranking.html](http://www.spc.int/prism/mdg/_ed_mdg_ranking.html)) accessed 8 Oct. 2007.
- [3] AusAID, *Solomon Islands Country Program* on AusAID's website (<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/country.cfm?CountryId=16>) accessed 2 June 2005.
- [4] NZAID, *Solomon Islands Country Program* on NZAID's website (<http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/programmes/c-solomon-islands.html>) accessed 19 June 2005.
- [5] See *New Zealand's Contribution to the Global Partnership for Development, the Millennium Development Goals, 2005*, p. 19 on NZAID's website (<http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/library/docs/mdg-report-2005.pdf.>).

*(Continued from inside front cover)*

RWS found the need for pursuing a vigorous, evidence-based policy advocacy to build shared understanding and rally civil society organizations (CSOs) around common goals, establish credibility with opinion-framers and decision-makers, marshal evidence as part of a systematic strategy to influence policy, and supply missing data on excluded and unreached sectors. Campaign calls and messages needed to be supported by credible evidence, based on the real state of education in communities.

#### **Asia-South Pacific Education Watch Initiative and Publications**

These publications are the result of education watch processes initiated and pursued since 2006 by the RWS programme of ASPBAE and GCE, in partnership with national education coalitions from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

Building on the successful Education Watch model implemented by CAMPE in Bangladesh, the Asia-South Pacific Education Watch (EdWatch) was designed and coordinated by the RWS Steering Committee composed of ASPBAE, Education International, and GlobalMarch Against Child Labor, and the RWS Asia Pacific staff.

EdWatch has emerged as an independent, citizen-based monitoring mechanism for assessing the status of education at the regional, national, and local levels, providing well-founded bases for advocacy and education campaign work and strengthening CSO capacities for policy engagement in education. It is designed to track governments' progress in achieving quality education for all, with focus on addressing the education deficit for disadvantaged sectors.

#### **Challenge to Civil Society**

The daunting education situation in the region poses a challenge to CSOs to sound a clear wake-up call to governments to shake off their complacency, go beyond rhetoric, summon the political will, and redouble efforts. There is a crying need to assess existing education programmes, allocate more funds and resources for education, and institute targeted measures to address education disadvantage.

Since Dakar 2000, CSO participation in EFA processes has seen the progressive growth in strength and maturity of national education coalitions, and their developing capacity to conduct research and policy analysis and advocacy. Armed with their EdWatch findings, CSOs and education stakeholders can put together more coherent education policy agenda for lobbying, disseminate information to enhance public awareness of education issues, effectively engage governments in education planning and policy-making, and strongly assert and sharpen CSO and stakeholders' participation in education governance at all levels.



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